A

SERMON

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OCTOBER the 7th, 1693.

AT THE

VISITATION

Of the Right Reverend Father in GOD,

HENRY Lord Bishop of *LONDON*.

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BY

Osp. Blackall, Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty.

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St. JOHN VI. 66, 67, 68.

From that time many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him.----Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

IN these words there are four things considerable.

I. A Remarkable Accident that befel our *Saviour* in the Course of his Ministry, his being deserted at once by a great many of his Disciples: *Many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

II. The Occasion of this great Desertion, intimated in that Clause, ἐκ τότε, *from that time*, or upon that occasion.

III. A Question thereupon put by our *Lord* to those few that still remained with him: *He said unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?* And,

IV. And Lastly, The honest and discreet Answer which *Simon Peter* in the name of the rest returned to this Question, *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*

Each of which Particulars will afford some useful Observations, which in the Sequel of this Discourse I shall briefly touch upon, (the time not permitting me to do more) and then make some Application of the whole. I begin with the first, *viz.*

I. The Relation of a Remarkable Accident that befel our *Saviour* in the Course of his Ministry, *viz.* his being de-

ſerted at once by a great many of his Diſciples: *Many of his diſciples went back, and walked no more with him.* The *Evangeliſt* doth not ſay how many, but that we may probably collect from the former part of the Chapter: For at the 10th Verſe we are told, That the number of thoſe that were with him before, and had been miraculouſly fed by him with five Barly-loaves, and two ſmall fiſhes, was about 5000, and that upon that they all of them acknowledged that he was the *Chriſt*, as you may ſee at the 14th Verſe, *This is of a truth* (ſay they) *that Prophet which ſhould come into the World*; and thereupon preſuming (according to the Notion generally received among the *Jews* at that time) that the *Meſſias* was to be a mighty Temporal Prince, they would fain then have perſwaded him to take upon him the Kingdom. Nay, as the *Evangeliſt* notes at the 15th Verſe, *They would have taken him by force, and made him a King*; which when our *Saviour* had avoided by conveying himſelf privately away, they would not however be thereby diverted from purſuing their Intention; but perceiving which way his Diſciples were gone over the Sea, and ſuppoſing that he had appointed to meet them on the other ſide, they took Shipping the very next day to follow him; and when they had found him, knowing that he had not gone over in the ſame Boat with his Diſciples, and that no other Boat had gone over beſides, except thoſe wherein they themſelves had paſſed, ſo that conſequently he muſt needs have conveyed himſelf over the Sea by a miracle; they ſeemed hereby ſtill the more confirmed in that belief which they had of him before; and yet behold on a ſudden, even the very ſame day, upon occaſion of ſome diſguſt which they took at his Doctrine, they all forſook him, leaving him (as it ſeems) alone, only with his Twelve Apoſtles. *Many of his diſciples went back, and walked no more with him.* From whence we may obſerve,

1. That

1. That Infallibility its ſelf is not ſufficient to prevent Schiſms and Separations in the Church. For ſurely they will not deny that our Bleſſed *Lord* and *Saviour* himſelf was an infallible Teacher, who believe that his pretended *Vicar* is ſo; and yet for all that, he was deſerted by a great many of his Diſciples; there were many more that forſook him, than there were that continued to adhere to him. Nay, indeed his Infallibility may be ſaid in ſome ſenſe to have been the occaſion of this great Schiſm; for the reaſon of their forſaking him was, becauſe he ſpake to them the words of Truth; for had he but ſuited his Doctrine to the Carnal Palates of his Hearers, they would ſtill have continued with him.

And if Infallibility will not ſerve for this purpoſe, there is, manifeſtly, no ſuch abſolute neceſſity, no ſuch great uſefulneſs of any Infallible Guide in the Church, as the *Romaniſts* pretend, who alſo from thence only, without any ground from Scripture, boldly infer that there is ſuch an one: For we have already an Infallible Rule both of Belief and Practice in the Holy Scriptures, and this Rule is ſufficiently plain to, and eaſily enough applicable by all ſuch as are of honeſt minds, and give due Attention and Regard to it. An Infallible Guide (if there were any ſuch now-a-days) could not teach more than the Holy Scriptures do, of ſuch things as are neceſſary to be known by us; neither could he teach the ſame things plainer than they teach them; and if men were of perverſe and carnal minds, they would give no more heed to the Infallible Guide, than they do now to the Infallible Rule; that is, they would hear him no longer than while his Doctrine pleaſed them, or while it was for their advantage to continue in his Communion; and when either his Doctrine was ungrateful, or it was not ſafe to adhere to him; they would do by him, as the Diſciples in the Text did by our *Saviour*, who was beyond all diſpute an Infallible Teacher; *They would go back, and walk no more with him.*

2. Another

2. Another thing that may be obſerved from hence, is this, That it is no juſt Objection againſt any *Church*, that there are a great many that diſlike it, and ſeparate from it.

Let not then our Adverſaries of the *Church* of *Rome* any more object againſt us (as they have uſed to do) that their *Church* is at Unity within its ſelf, that they are all of one Mind, agreeing in the ſame Form of Doctrine, and holding together in the ſame Worſhip; whereas no ſooner did the *Reformed Churches* ſeparate from them, but they were immediately divided into innumerable *Sects* among themſelves; each pretending to greater Purity and Perfection than the other. For beſides that the truth of this matter of fact might well be doubted, *viz.* whether there be greater Diviſions among *Proteſtants*, than among *Papiſts*; which point I will not at this time diſpute; This I dare boldly ſay, That the Unity which they boaſt of, is in great meaſure owing to the Inquiſition, and ſuch other means of holding their People in their Communion, as we neither do, nor think lawful to uſe.

And then after all, the Separation of other *Sects* from the *Reformed Churches*, is not a juſter Objection againſt them, than the Separation of the *Reformed Churches* themſelves from the *Church* of *Rome* (with which they once held Communion) is againſt that *Church*: So that if there be any thing in this Argument, it holds every whit as ſtrong againſt them, as againſt us.

But the truth of it is, the Argument its ſelf is of no force againſt either one or the other. But in the Caſe of Separation the only point to be conſidered in order to the diſcerning where the blame lies, is for what cauſe the Separation was made. For if the ground of our ſeparating from the *Roman Church* be, (as indeed it was) becauſe we could not communicate with her without Sin, this juſtifies our Separation, and is indeed a juſt Objection againſt that *Church* which enjoined ſuch unlawful terms of Communion. And

on

on the other ſide, if the Doctrine that we profeſs and teach be Pure and Orthodox, and our Worſhip (to ſay the leaſt of it) ſuch as may in every part of it be lawfully joined in; if even they who diſſent from us, cannot fix on any one thing in our Communion which they can prove is unlawful; if conſequently the ground of their Separation from us, be either becauſe *they will not endure ſound Doctrine*, or becauſe they have *itching Ears*, which nothing will pleaſe but Novelties; they indeed are highly to blame who ſeparate from us upon ſuch trifling Accounts; but it is no more a juſt Objection againſt our *Church*, That there are ſome that ſeparate from it; than it was againſt that *Church* which was at firſt Aſſembled, and governed by our *Lord* himſelf in Perſon, that there were ſome who when they had liſted themſelves under him as his Diſciples, did afterwards (upon an unreaſonable and groundleſs diſguſt) *go back and walk no more with him.*

3. What may further be obſerved from hence in general, is this, That the Example of a Multitude is not a ſufficient inducement to follow their practice, any further than the ſame may be juſtified by reaſon. For in the Text we are told, that many of our *Lords* Diſciples (probably not fewer than 5000) went away from him at once, and (as far as appears by the Hiſtory) there were only 12 that remained with him, a very ſmall number in compariſon with that great Multitude that went away; and yet there can be no doubt, but that theſe were the *True Church*, and that they which went away were *Schiſmaticks.*

From whence therefore (by the way) we may obſerve, how vain and trifling that Argument is, which they of the *Church* of *Rome* do urge in behalf of their *Church*, and to perſwade us to return to it, taken from the great Multitude of thoſe that are of the *Roman* Communion, in compariſon with the *Reformed Churches.*

For

For granting that the *Roman Church* is of much greater extent than the *Reformed*; nay, if we ſhould grant it to be of larger extent than all the *Chriſtian Churches* beſides, that are not of her Communion (which yet is certainly falſe) this is but a very ſorry Argument to prove her to be the True, and only True *Chriſtian Church.*

For if truth be always on the ſide of the greateſt number, Which was the *True Church* in *Abraham*'s time, when he was of a Religion by himſelf? Was it in his ſmall Family, or amongſt the *Idolatrous Nations* that dwelt round about him; Or which was the *True Church* in all that long Tract of time from *Moſes* to our *Saviour?* Was it not confined to a very ſmall ſpot of Land, even when it was at its largeſt extent? And that again contracted to a much leſs compaſs in *Elijah*'s time, when there were not in Ten of the *Tribes* of *Iſrael*, above *Seven thouſand men who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.*

1 Kings 19. 18.

Again, if that be always the *True Church* which is the largeſt, time was when the *Arian Hereticks* were the *True Chriſtian Church*, and the Orthodox Profeſſors of *Chriſtianity* (who were but a very few in number, in compariſon with them) were conſequently miſerably deluded, and rank Hereticks. And thus, according to this Rule given by the *Romaniſts* for finding out the *True Church*, truth and goodneſs are really nothing at all, but vary according to the Fancies and Cuſtoms of Men; and what is true and good now, may in the next Age become very falſe and wicked.

But by what hath been ſaid, it appears, that the true Worſhippers of *God* have ſometimes been but a very few, and that the *True Church of Chriſt* hath in ſome Ages conſiſted but of a very ſmall number; and what has been once, may be again. So, that tho we ſhould grant that the *Roman Church* is larger than any one, or even than all the *Reformed Churches* together; yet ſtill theſe may be the *True Churches* of *Chriſt*, and that not; for why may not the True Religion, and

and the right Worſhip of *God* be confined to a narrow compaſs now, as well as it hath been in former times?

The truth is, number or fewneſs, are both meerly accidental and extrinſecal things; ſometimes a multitude may be in the right, and ſometimes (probably much oftner) they are in the wrong; and whether they be in the right or no, is a thing to be inquired into, not to be taken for granted. For Truth and Goodneſs are always the ſame, but the Fancies and Opinions of Men are infinitely various and uncertain. And therefore ſeeing *God* hath not left it to us to determine among our ſelves by moſt Votes, which is the True Religion, and the Right Worſhip of *God*, but hath himſelf clearly ſtated and fully determined this matter in the Books of Scripture many hundred years ago, that Determination of his is, and will ever be moſt undoubtedly true; 'tis that therefore that we muſt ſtick to, and abide by, let the Crowd, or the Multitude go which way it will.

And ſo much for the firſt thing: *Many of his diſciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

II. The ſecond thing which I took notice of in the words, was the occaſion of this great Schiſm, intimated in that Clauſe, ἐκ τότε, *from that time*, or (as it may be rendred) upon that occaſion: *Many of his diſciples went back.*

Now what the occaſion was, we muſt learn from the foregoing part of the Chapter, and it was (in ſhort) this.

Our *Saviour* well knowing the Hypocriſy of that great Crowd that followed him, and that all their pretended Zeal for him was really nothing elſe but Intereſt, plainly tells them of it, *v.* 26. *Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, ye ſeek me not becauſe ye ſaw the miracles, but becauſe ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled*; and thereupon takes occaſion to perſwade them to withdraw their Hearts and Affections from this World, and from their Temporal Intereſts and Concernments, and to give themſelves up to be inſtructed by

him in the way and means of Salvation, *v.* 27. *Labour not for the meat which periſheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlaſting life, which the Son of man ſhall give unto you, for him hath God the Father ſealed.* And this ſubject he proſecutes in the remaining part of the Chapter, ſhewing by many Arguments, that there was no way for them to attain the Bleſſedneſs of the other World, but by receiving and believing his Doctrine, and leading their Lives according to it. And ἐκ τούτου, upon this occaſion, *many* of them *went back, and walked no more with him.* While he fed them with the Loaves, and while they hoped he would be a Temporal King, and that they (as being the firſt that had declared for him) ſhould be preferr'd to great Places and Dignities under him, ſo long he could not get rid of their Company, tho he had endeavoured to do it; but when once he came to tell them plainly of their faults, and to diſſwade them from minding ſo much as they did the Intereſts of this World; when he had acquainted them that his Kingdom was a Spiritual Kingdom, and that the only way for them to be made Partakers of it, was by carefully obſerving thoſe ſtrict Rules of Holineſs and Virtue which he taught; at this they were greatly offended; and it was now as hard to keep them together, as it was before to diſmiſs them: Upon this occaſion *many went back, and walked no more with him.*

From whence we may obſerve (and 'tis the only thing I ſhall at preſent obſerve from hence) That 'tis the Duty of thoſe who are *Miniſters* of the *Goſpel* boldly to ſpeak the Truth, and reprove Vice, whatever offence may be taken at them for it.

In other things indeed it becomes them (and it is a part of that prudence which it is their duty to exerciſe in their behaviour towards others) to be as compliant and complaiſant as they can; and according to St. *Paul*'s Example, 1 Cor. 9. 22. to be *made all things to all men, that they may by all means gain ſome*; But the *Truth* of the *Goſpel* is not to be parted with

with upon any terms, neither may they upon any conſideration whatſoever ſooth up their People in their Sins, and *cry peace, peace, when there is no peace.* Nay, if they only wink at their faults, if they only forbear to reprove them for their Sins, and to acquaint them with the danger of continuing in them, they are careleſs of their Charge, and unfaithful to their Truſt, and while they ſeem tender of giving Offence, do indeed give the greateſt Offence; at once expoſing their Sacred Office to contempt, and hazarding the Salvation of their own Souls. For ſo we are plainly told, Ezek. 33. 7. *I have ſet thee a watchman unto the houſe of Iſrael, therefore thou ſhalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me: When I ſay unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou ſhalt ſurely die; if thou doſt not ſpeak to warn the wicked man from his way, that wicked man ſhall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand.*

Here (my Reverend Brethren) we ſee our Duty, and the ſtrict Obligation that lies upon us to diſcharge it. And this is what we are to look to, to do our own Duty faithfully, and leave the iſſue and event of all to *God.*

It may be that our boldneſs in the diſcharge of our Miniſtry, may prove a Prejudice to our worldly Intereſt, and many may account us *their Enemies*, and uſe us as ſuch, only becauſe we are their beſt Friends *in telling them the truth*; but there is no worldly Intereſt whatſoever ſo great as to be fit to ſtand in competition with the Intereſt of our own, and our Peoples Souls.

Or it may be, if we will not hold our peace; if we will needs be preaching up unpopular Truths, and laſhing the reigning Vices of the Age, ſome will take offence at our freedom, and (now eſpecially, that they are, as they think, at liberty to profeſs any Religion, or to be of none) will forſake our Aſſemblies, and either joyn themſelves to ſome other Congregations, where they hope they ſhall hear more comfortable Doctrine, or perhaps will throw off at

once all ſhow and profeſſion of Religion; ——— but be it ſo, —— the fear or the probability of this, will not juſtify
2 Tim. 4. 2. us in neglecting our own Duty, which is to *be inſtant in ſeaſon, and out of ſeaſon, and to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all long-ſuffering and doctrine.* This is the Direction that St. *Paul* gives to *Timothy*, and in him to all the *Miniſters* of the *Goſpel*; and that too, altho he foreſaw that the conſequence of it would ſometimes be, that ſuch plain dealing would diſoblige a great many, and make them forſake the Aſſemblies of the Faithful; for that he had this then in his mind, ſeems highly probable, from what he
Verſe 3. immediately adds in the very next words; *The time will come when they will not endure ſound Doctrine, but after their own luſts ſhall they heap to themſelves teachers, having itching ears, and they ſhall turn away their ears from the truth.*

'Tis true indeed, we ought, as the *Apoſtle* there directs, *to rebuke, and exhort with all long-ſuffering*; *i. e.* to temper our reproofs with ſuch Mildneſs, and Gentleneſs, and Prudence, as that (if it be poſſible) we may give no offence to any; but if it be the truth it ſelf that gives the offence, and not the imprudent manner of its delivery, our buſineſs is not to *pleaſe men* but *God*; and we muſt do our Duty, and ſpeak the Words which he hath put into our Mouth, *and rebuke with all Authority*, not regarding what may be the conſequence of it.

We may think, perhaps, that in caſe our boldneſs in ſpeaking the Truth, and reproving Vice, ſhould drive away any from our Aſſemblies, (eſpecially if they be Perſons of Note and Authority in the place where they live) this would be to the diſadvantage of our Church and Religion.

But no ſuch matter; for of all thoſe that ſeparate from the Church upon ſuch an account, we may truly ſay, as the Apoſtle St. *John* does of ſome Separatiſts in his time,

1 Epiſt.

1 Epiſt. 2 19. *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us.* Such are as much the *Churches* Enemies before their Separation, as they can be afterwards; and of the two, ſhe had better have them open Enemies, than ſecret ones. But as for all ſuch as are of Honeſt minds, and ſincere, and hearty in their Profeſſions, they will like us the better for that, for which the others diſlike us; whereas on the contrary, if we ſhould be afraid to do our Duty, if we ſhould be meally-mouth'd, and not dare to ſpeak the Truth for fear of the diſpleaſure of ſuch men, this would indeed be a great prejudice to our Cauſe, as giving juſt offence to the beſt men, and too great occaſion, *to ſuch as deſire occaſion*, to ſlight and deſpiſe our Office.

In fine; What we can be only afraid of in this caſe, is no more than what our *Saviour* (*who knew what was in men*) certainly foreknew would happen to himſelf; for he knew that the greateſt part of the Multitude that followed him, followed him for the Loaves, and in hope to advance their Temporal Intereſt by early appearing to be his Diſciples; he knew conſequently, that upon his declaring the Truth to them, and reproving them for their worldly-mindedneſs, they would forſake his Company; but tho he foreſaw this event, he would not be unfaithful in his Office, or neglect that buſineſs for which he came into the World, which was *to bear Witneſs unto the Truth*; John 18. 37. he choſe rather to have but a few ſincere Followers, than a great number of Hypocritical Profeſſors; and therefore would not diſſemble the Truth, altho he knew that upon his declaring it, *many would go back, and walk no more with him.*

And now I proceed to the third Thing obſervable in the Text, *viz.*

III. The

III. The Queſtion which our *Lord* (upon the occaſion of this great Deſertion) puts to thoſe that ſtill remained with him, *Jeſus ſaid unto the twelve, Will ye alſo go away?*

And with what deſign this Queſtion was put, might have been doubted, if it had been put by another; but it is certain, that our *Saviour* did not put it to the *Twelve*, to know their minds, for as the *Evangeliſt* ſays, *He knew all men, and needed not that any ſhould teſtify of man, for he knew what was in man.*

John 2. 24.

Theſe words therefore, *Will ye alſo go away?* are not ſo much a Queſtion put to them, to know whether they would ſtay or go, as an Option given them, a leaving it to their Will and Choice, whether they would do one or the other — as if he had ſaid,— *You ſee how many there are that have taken offence at my doctrine, and have upon that account all at once deſerted me; but I am not at all concerned at their departure, for I deſire no ſubjects but ſuch as are willing to be ſo, and will be obedient to my words. If therefore you are of the ſame mind with them, if my doctrine does not reliſh with you, if your hearts (as theirs) are wholly ſet upon this World, and the intereſts of this Life, and you value not the having a portion in my Spiritual Kingdom, or diſlike the Conditions of attaining it, 'tis to no purpoſe for you to ſtay any longer with me; for this is all the reward that I promiſe to my diſciples: You are at your own liberty therefore to go or ſtay as you pleaſe; freely and willingly you gave up your ſelves at firſt to be my Diſciples, and freely and willingly you ſhall continue ſo, or not at all; as I did not force you to follow me, ſo neither will I compel you to ſtay with me; Do what you think beſt for your ſelves; If you like the terms of my Diſcipleſhip, and think the reward that I propoſe, a ſufficient encouragement, and are perſwaded that I am able to make good what I promiſe, then ſtay with me; but if not, you alſo may follow the five thouſand that are already gone away: I will not detain you againſt your minds.— Will ye alſo go away?*

From

From whence we may obſerve theſe two Things.

1. That it is not agreeable to the *Nature* of the *Goſpel* to force or compel men to the Profeſſion of it.

If indeed Salvation were annexed to the outward Profeſſion of *Chriſtianity*, and every Viſible Member of the *Church*, were alſo a Member of *Chriſt*'s Spiritual Kingdom, it would be ſuch a great deed of Charity to entitle men to theſe benefits, as would be ſufficient to compenſate for any hardſhip that they were put to in order to it; and if men were, or could be forced to be ſaved, even altho it were by *Fire and Faggot*, they would have no more reaſon to cry out of Perſecution, or to complain of any injury that was done them, than a man that was juſt ready to be drowned would have, if he that pull'd him out of the Water and ſaved his Life, ſhould do it by the ſpraining of his Arm.

But the Caſe here is otherwiſe; for the Spiritual Kingdom of *Chriſt* is made up only of ſuch as willingly ſubmit to it; and tho force may make many Hypocrites, it cannot make one true *Chriſtian*; for no outward force can compel the Will to conſent, tho it may compel the Mouth to ſpeak, or the Body to act.

Not but that after all, it is moſt undoubtedly the Duty of *Chriſtian Magiſtrates* to endeavour that all their Subjects may be brought both to the Profeſſion and Belief of the *True Chriſtian Faith*; and to this end they ought to ſet up, and eſtabliſh in their Dominions the *True Chriſtian Worſhip*, and to take care that their Subjects may be inſtructed in it, and alſo to give them all reaſonable Encouragement in the Profeſſion and Exerciſe of it.

Nay, I will not ſay that they may not, (for I am fully perſwaded that they may) make uſe of the Sword wherewith *God* has entruſted them, for the correcting and reſtraining the Exorbitances of a miſguided and ungovern-

able

able Zeal, and the outrages of a miſtaken Religion; and *for the cutting off of all ſuch workers of iniquity, as turn Religion into Rebellion, and Faith into Faction.*

But in what caſes it is proper to make uſe of the Temporal Sword in Matters of Religion; what Temporal Encouragements are proper to be given to the Profeſſion of the True Religion, and what Diſcouragements to Error and Schiſm, being Subjects needful to be enquired into only by them that have the power of making or executing Laws, are not ſo proper to be diſcourſed of here.

But in general, That no man can, or ought to be compell'd to be a *Chriſtian*, I think is very plain from our *Saviour's* Example; for tho his Kingdom was Spiritual, *i. e.* tho he was pleaſed to uſe only Spiritual Means and Motives to engage men to be his Diſciples, he could have uſed other means if he had pleaſed; for as he himſelf tells us, Matth. 28. 18. *All power in heaven and earth was given unto him*; and therefore, if External Force and Compulſion had been a proper means to enlarge his Kingdom, and propagate his Religion, he would, doubtleſs, have made uſe of it; or at leaſt have commiſſioned and impower'd his *Apoſtles* to uſe it; and not have only ſaid to them (as he does in the words immediately following thoſe aforecited) *go ye therefore, and teach all nations:* He would not certainly (as he does in the Text) have left it to the Choice and Option of his own Diſciples, whether they would continue in the Profeſſion of his Religion or no; *Will ye alſo go away?*

2. Another thing that may be obſerved from hence, is this, That no Licenſe given, no Toleration granted, no Exemption from Temporal Penalties in caſe of Separation allowed by men, is ſufficient to excuſe from the guilt of Schiſm thoſe that ſeparate from the *True Chriſtian Church* whereof they were Members, or to render their Schiſm no Sin.

For

For what think you, if the Twelve *Apoſtles*, upon this leave given them by *Chriſt*, had gone back with the Five thouſand, would they not by our *Saviour* himſelf (at the great day) have been judged *Schiſmaticks* or *Apoſtates* for their ſo deſerting him?

And yet (as Man) he gave them leave to forſake him; he left it to their choice, whether they would ſtay with him or no; he uſed no Force or Compulſion to keep them againſt their Wills; ſo that here was truly Liberty of Conſcience granted them: They might be *Chriſtians* if they would; if not, they might return back to the *Synagogue*, or go whither elſe they pleaſed: Here were no worldly Motives offered to them to induce them either to ſtay or to go, but the whole matter was left to their own Conſcience.

But notwithſtanding this Toleration, (as it may be called) it was moſt certainly their Duty ſtill to adhere to that Profeſſion of *Chriſtianity*, which they had taken upon themſelves; and if they had forſaken it, they would have been guilty of a moſt inexcuſable Sin before *God*.

And the Caſe is the ſame now; Humane Lawgivers may give leave to their Subjects to be of any Religion, or to be of no Religion; but if they do, they can't make it lawful in its ſelf, either to be *Athieſts*, or to profeſs a falſe Religion, or to forſake the Communion of the *True Church*; for to believe a *God*, and to worſhip him Publickly, and to worſhip him in the Aſſemblies of the Faithful, are Duties that are laid upon us by a higher than any Humane Authority; and therefore no Humane Authority can diſcharge us from them.

The Law can take away and diſcharge us from no Obligation, but that which its ſelf laid upon us; ſo that all the meaning of the largeſt and moſt unlimited Toleration that the Law can grant, is no more than this, *viz.* a Declaration that men ſhall not be liable to any Temporal Mulcts or Penalties, or be any ways puniſh'd by the Civil

Power, upon the account of any Differences in Religion, or for being of no Religion at all; but if antecedently to the Eſtabliſhment of any *Church* by the *Civil Power*, and if antecedently to the enacting of any Penal Laws to oblige Men to hold its Communion, it was a Schiſm to ſeparate without cauſe, from that *Chriſtian Church* whereof we were Members, and ſuch Schiſmatical Separation was a Sin before *God*, then ſo it will be ſtill, notwithſtanding any Licenſe or Toleration that can be granted by the Secular Power.

But now, That before any Civil Laws were enacted in favour of the *Church*, it was unlawful for any man to ſeparate from that *Church* whereof he was a Member, without cauſe; and that ſuch Separation rendred men guilty of the Sin of Schiſm, and that Schiſm was a damnable Sin, is clearly evident from Holy Scripture.

For in the *Apoſtles* days, there was no Civil Eſtabliſhment of any *Church*, all the Civil Powers then in being were either *Jewiſh* or *Heathen*, and *Judaiſm* or *Paganiſm* were the only eſtabliſhed Religions; and all Profeſſion of the *Chriſtian Religion* was ſtrictly prohibited under the ſevereſt Penalties; but for all that, there was a *Chriſtian Church* even in thoſe days, with which all *Chriſtians* were obliged to hold Communion, and from which it was a Sin to ſeparate: *They continued ſtedfaſtly in the Apoſtles doctrine and fellowſhip*, ſaith St. *Luke*, declaring the Practice of the firſt Converted *Chriſtians*, *Acts* 2. 42. Even then it was a Sin to *forſake the aſſembling themſelves together*, as you may ſee, *Heb.* 10. 25. Even then it was a Duty *to mark them that cauſed Diviſions and Offences, contrary to the Doctrine which they had learned*, [from Chriſt and his Apoſtles] *and to avoid them*; *Rom.* 16. 17. Even then *Strifes* and *Diviſions* were Acts of *Carnality*, as we are told, 1 *Cor.* 3. 3. and *Hereſy* was then one of thoſe *Works of the Fleſh*, of which the *Apoſtle* ſays, That *they which do ſuch things ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God*, Gal. 5. 20.

In

In a word; There was a *Chriſtian Church* before there was any *Chriſtian State*; and long before there were any *Acts of Uniformity* made, it was an *Apoſtolical Canon, Let all things be done decently and in order*; which obliged both the *Biſhops* and *Governors* of the *Church* to ordain ſuch Conſtitutions as were requiſite for the decent and orderly Celebration of the Publick Worſhip, and the *People* to ſubmit thereunto. From the very beginning of *Chriſtianity*, it was a Duty incumbent on all *Chriſtians* to endeavour to *keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*; *and with one mind, and one mouth to glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt:* And it was always againſt the Nature and Conſtitution of the *Chriſtian Church*, that there ſhould be Diviſions in it, or Separations from it.

1 Cor. 14. 40.

Eph 4. 3. Rom. 15. 6.

Seeing therefore *Church Communion* is a Duty laid upon us by *God*; it plainly follows, That no Human Authority can releaſe us from our Obligation to it; and conſequently, that theſe words, ——*Will ye go away?* —— *Or you may go away if you will*; by what man ſoever they are pronounced, cannot make it lawful for us to forſake the Aſſemblies of the Faithful, and to leave the Communion of that *Chriſtian Church* in which we were baptized, and of which we are Members, ſo long as the terms of her Communion are lawful.—And ſo much for the third thing.—I proceed now to the Fourth and Laſt thing obſervable in the Text, *viz.*

IV. The honeſt and diſcreet Anſwer that was made by *Simon Peter*, in the Name of *himſelf*, and the other *Apoſtles*, when this Option was put to them, *Will ye alſo go away?* ſays our *Saviour*; *Lord*, ſays he, *to whom ſhall we go? Thou haſt the words of eternal life.*

From whence we may briefly obſerve theſe three things,

1. That 'tis indiſpenſibly neceſſary to be of ſome *Church* or other; this is clearly intimated in the *Apoſtle*'s anſwer, *Lord,*

to whom ſhall we go? He takes it for granted, as a matter of which there could be no reaſonable doubt, that in caſe they had left our *Lord*, they muſt have betaken themſelves to ſome other guide; and that if they had forſaken his Communion, they muſt have gone over to ſome other Communion; he ſuppoſes it as a moſt evident and undeniable Truth (as indeed it is) That it is not enough for a man *to have Faith to himſelf*, to adore *God* only in his heart, or to Worſhip him only in his Cloſet, but that it is alſo neceſſary to make a publick Profeſſion of that Religion which he is of, and to hold Communion with others of the ſame Faith and Profeſſion, in the Common Acts of Worſhip and Devotion. And this is a Point very needful, and well worthy to be conſidered by a great many that now-a-days do forſake our Churches, not to go to any other Religious Aſſemblies, but to ſpend their time in ſleeping or dozing at home, or in tipling at the Ale-houſe. If we go from thee, *to whom ſhall we go?*

2. Therefore, what may be further obſerved from hence is this, That ſeeing it is neceſſary to be of ſome *Church* or other, it is highly unreaſonable to ſeparate from the *Church* whereof we are Members, till we have found out a better *Church* to joyn our ſelves to.

Quite contrary to which is the practice of many *Separatiſts*, who firſt deſert their own *Church*, while as yet they are to ſeek what Religion to be of, and what *Church* to go to; they firſt throw off, upon ſome fooliſh diſguſt or fanciful diſlike, the Religion they were bred up in, and then under a pretence that they are making enquiry which is the beſt Religion, ſpend all the reſt of their Lives without any Religion at all.

It is indeed St. *Paul*'s Direction, 1 *Theſſ.* 5. 21. That we ſhould *prove all things*; and this is a Text often cited by theſe men in juſtification of themſelves; and they value themſelves at no ſmall rate, for their having (as they think) the Scripture its ſelf on their ſide. But

But they ſhould do well to read the whole Verſe throughout, and then they would ſee clearly how little this Text makes for them: *Prove all things*, ſaith the *Apoſtle*, and then he immediately adds, *and hold faſt that which is good.* The meaning of which laſt Clauſe is at leaſt thus much; That when we are ſatisfied of the goodneſs of our own way, we ſhould ſtick to it, and hold faſt the Profeſſion of our Faith without wavering; it being then both unreaſonable and endleſs to make further trials.

But ſuppoſe we are not fully ſatisfied in this point; ſuppoſe we have ſome little Doubts and Scruples in our minds, whether that Religion and way of Worſhip that we have been bred up in, be the beſt or no? do they think that the *Apoſtle* would have us be of all Religions one after another, that ſo at laſt we may be able to judge which is beſt? This would be juſt as if a man in his Journey meeting with ſeveral croſs ways, ſhould go a little in one, and a little in another, and a little in a third, and ſo on; the certain conſequence of which would be, that having ſpent his whole day in making theſe trials of the ſeveral ways that preſented themſelves, he would be no nearer his Journeys end at Night, than he was in the Morning.

Or do they think that he would have us be of no Religion, till we had firſt carefully examined into the Grounds and Reaſons of all; this would be every whit as ill as the other: For there are very few that by their Parts and Learning are qualified to undertake, and fewer yet (if any at all) that have leiſure enough from the neceſſary avocations of Life, to go through with ſuch a difficult and tedious Work as this would be; ſo that for a man to take this method, would be juſt as if the travelling-man before ſpoken of, meeting with ſeveral croſs ways, ſhould ſpend his whole day in ſitting ſtill and conſidering which of them to chuſe, but ſhould go in none of them; how ſhould he ever come to his Journeys end?

But

But the courſe that a wiſe man in ſuch a caſe would take, is this; If he were left wholly to himſelf to judge, he would according to the beſt of his skill, and as the time and exigence would permit, chuſe that Road which appeared to him to be the right; or if he had a Guide with him, on whoſe skill and judgment he might with prudence rely, rather than on his own, he would take that way which he directed him to; and when he was once entred into it, he would go on ſteddily in it, never ſtopping or ſtaying in the leaſt, unleſs by ſome evident Tokens he ſhould be clearly convinced that he was in the wrong; and never leaving that way for another, unleſs he were fully aſſured that the other was much better: A man that takes this courſe may arrive to the place whither he deſigns, which it is certain neither of the other can do: Or if after all he ſhould be in a miſtake, yet having done his beſt, and taken the prudenteſt method that he could, his miſtake would be pitiable and pardonable.

And I dare be bold to ſay, That that man, who according to the beſt of his knowledge, ſerves *God* faithfully, and worſhips him with a ſincere and devout heart, although in a miſtaken way, ſhall find more favour with *God*, and fare better in the other World, than he that is *ever learning, but is never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*; or who under a pretence that he is quite at a loſs, and in a great uncertainty, in what way *God* would be worſhipped, paſſes his days without making profeſſion of any Religion, and never worſhips *God* at all.

And therefore before we leave that way which we have been bred up, and educated in, we ſhould be fully convinced that we are in an error, and fix upon ſome other way to take, and be certainly aſſured that the way we take, is betttr than that we leave. *Lord, to whom ſhall we go?* We know not whither elſe to go, and therefore why ſhould we go from thee? But,

3. And

3. And laſtly. Another thing that may be obſerved from this Anſwer of the Apoſtle's, is this: That there can be no ſufficient reaſon to ſeparate from a *Church*, which *has the words of eternal life: Lord, to whom ſhall we go? thou haſt the words of eternal life.* As if he had ſaid,

We know that thou art true, and teacheſt the way of God in truth: We are ſure that we are ſafe in following thee; ſo that ſhould we forſake thee, and follow another, 'tis impoſſible we ſhould get by the change: On a worſe Guide we may eaſily happen, but a better we cannot have: *To whom* then *ſhall we go*, if we go from thee; or upon what account ſhould we leave thee for any other, ſeeing *thou haſt the words of eternal life?* Matth. 22. 16.

And this is a Point that many of our *diſſenting Brethren* would do well to conſider ſeriouſly of; What reaſon they have to forſake the Communion of the *Eſtabliſhed Church.*

Some, perhaps, will ſay, That the Terms of her Communion are unlawful, and that they can't with a good Conſcience join in her Worſhip. Now whether or no they ſay true in this, *God* will judge; but if they do ſpeak the truth, and are really perſuaded, as they ſay, here is a reaſonable Plea for ſeparation.

But the far greateſt part of thoſe that ſeparate from the *Church*, do not pretend this; They think our Worſhip lawful, and occaſionally (eſpecially to qualify themſelves for an Office) they can and do join in it; and her Doctrine they likewiſe own to be true and agreeable to the Scriptures. They grant there is nothing neceſſary to Salvation wanting in our *Church*, and nothing deſtructive to Salvation enjoyned: Nay, they ſay farther, (and that they think will fully juſtify them from the charge of Schiſm) that the Congregations which they join themſelves to, and do ordinarily communicate with, own the ſame Scriptures, profeſs the ſame *Creed*, worſhip the ſame *God*, and are in all reſpects of the ſame Religion that we are of.

But

But if it be ſo, then why do they go from us? If they believe that we *have the words of eternal life*, what need they go elſewhere? what can they hope for more in the Communion of any other Church, than they might have in their own? If they are really of the ſame Religion with us, why do they break our Communion? why do they make a rent and a Schiſm in the *Church* for nothing?

They indeed that forſake a Corrupt *Church*, or an Idolatrous Worſhip; they that leave the Communion of a *Church*, in which they think they could not be ſaved, act prudently and wiſely; but to forſake a *Church*, and at the ſame time to profeſs that they are ſtill of the ſame Religion with that *Church* which they have forſaken, is a practice which I think no account can be given of. This is certainly to break the Unity of the *Church* for nothing, and needleſly to make a rent and a Schiſm in the *Body* of *Chriſt*; and that very thing which they plead in excuſe for their Schiſm, does to my apprehenſion render it altogether inexcuſable: For if ever Schiſm be a ſin, it is certainly ſo, when there is no cauſe for it; and there can be no juſt cauſe to leave that Church which we were bred in, and are Members of, and to go over to another which profeſſes the ſame Faith, teaches the ſame Doctrines, and agrees in all the Eſſentials of Worſhip with that Church which we leave. For why ſhould a man leave the *Eſtabliſh'd Church*, and go to another, or ſet up another againſt it, when by his own confeſſion he does not mend himſelf by the change, but might have been ſaved as well in that *Church* which he leaves, as in that which he goes to?

But I know it is pleaded by this ſort of *Separatiſts*, That though they agree with us in the Subſtantials of Religion, they differ from us in the Circumſtantials, and therefore go for the moſt part to other Religious Aſſemblies, becauſe there they think God is worſhipped after a purer manner than he is amongſt us; That tho there be in the *Eſtabliſhed Church*

Church all things neceſſary to Salvation, and ſhe has *the words of eternal life*; yet ſhe has alſo ſome unneceſſary Obſervances, ſome Rites and Ceremonies which they think might be better omitted, and which are not uſed in thoſe Religious Meetings which they join themſelves to.

But to this the anſwer is eaſy: Either theſe Circumſtantials of our Worſhip, theſe Rites and Ceremonies are lawful to be uſed, or not; now if they be not lawful to be uſed; if (for inſtance) it be unlawful to be preſent at, and to join in thoſe Prayers which the Miniſter puts up while he is clothed with a white Garment; or if it be unlawful to receive the Sacrament upon the Knee, why do they ever do theſe things at all? why do they do that to qualify themſelves for an Office, which if it be a ſin, they ought not to do to *gain the whole world?* But if theſe things be lawful, and the only thing they have to ſay againſt them, is, that they are in their opinion needleſs and ſuperfluous Obſervances; what a ſmall reaſon is this to make a Schiſm and Diviſion in the *Church?* There can be no end of Separations and Diviſions if they may be juſtified by ſuch fanciful diſlikes as theſe; for the Fancies of men are ſo infinitely different as to ſuch things, that 'tis impoſſible that the ſame ſhould pleaſe all people; ſo that either Church-communion is no duty, or elſe ſuch diſlikes of the Fancy only cannot be a ſufficient ground of a Separation; for there is no Congregation where the *Miniſter* is not cloathed with ſome Garment or other, and where the *Sacrament* is not received in ſome poſture or other; and there is no Garment or poſture, which ſome may not have a fancy againſt, as well as againſt theſe, and with as good reaſon. Nay, not only the Fancies of divers men, but even of the ſame men at divers times, are ſo very different as to ſuch things, that what they like one day, they oftentimes diſlike as much the next; ſo that he who goes from a Pure and Orthodox *Church*, upon ſuch trivial accounts, cannot tell himſelf whither he ſhall go

at laſt; but it is moſt probable, that if he goes on thus indulging his Fancy, he will be one day of this *Sect*, another of another, and a third of a third, till at laſt having tried all *Sects*, and found in every one ſomething that he diſliked, he will come to be of no Religion at all. Or if not ſo; yet 'tis highly probable, that while he thus buſies himſelf about the Ceremonies and Circumſtantials of Religion, he will neglect the ſubſtance of it, and *omit the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith*, without which all his zeal for the external Purity of the Divine Worſhip will avail him nothing.

Thus having, as briefly as I could, run through all thoſe Particulars which the Text offered to our meditation; I proceed in a few words to apply what hath been ſaid; and indeed the Application is ſo eaſy, that I ſhall not need to be long in it.

For as it happened to our Saviour in the 1ſt Verſe of the Text, ſo it hath happened to this *Church* whereof we are Members; many that formerly joined in her Communion, and ſeemed as hearty and zealous in it as any, have of late forſaken her.

I will not make the Application ſo near, as to ſay that they then followed her for the Loaves, and for their temporal Intereſt, tho their leaving her juſt at this time, might well enough make that be ſuſpected; neither will I ſay that the true reaſon of their leaving her, is, becauſe her Doctrine is too pure, and too good for them.

But whatever was the motive of their ſeparation, 'tis matter of fact that there are many now gone away (tho God be thanked not near ſo many, as it was bragg'd there would be, if ever a Toleration were granted) *many* there are that *are gone back, and will now walk no more with us.*

But the number of *Separatiſts* from any *Church*, is not (as I have ſhewed) a juſt Objection againſt it; neither ought it to be any inducement to others to follow their Example; for

for what hath now happen'd to our *Church*, is not near ſo much as befel our *Lord* himſelf, who had 5000 *Diſciples* that deſerted him at once, while only *twelve* remained with him.

And what he ſaid to them, I may ſay to you that ſtill continue in our Communion; If you are diſpoſed to follow the Example that theſe have ſet you, you have now free liberty to do it: You alſo may go away if you pleaſe; there is no reſtraint now laid upon you by the Laws; the whole matter is between God and your ſelves.

But nevertheleſs, let me tell you, you are ſtill as much obliged in conſcience to hold communion with us, as ever you were; and if we have the *words of eternal life*; if the Doctrine which we profeſs and teach, be pure and orthodox; if the Holy Sacraments are duly and rightly adminiſtred among us; and if our Worſhip be ſuch as you may lawfully join in; here is no juſt ground for a ſeparation; and if you ſeparate without juſt ground from the *Eſtabliſhed Church*, in which you were born and bred, and with which you ought to hold communion in ſacred things, you rend the Body of *Chriſt*, and are *Schiſmaticks* before *God*, altho you are not guilty of any *State-crime*, nor incur any legal Penalties.

Conſider well then what you do; If we have the *words of eternal life*, why ſhould you leave us? what can you hope for more in any other Communion?

Conſider at leaſt, before you go away from us, whither you will go when you have left us; and forſake not this *Church*, till you are ſure you have found out a better, to join your ſelves to.

It was very reaſonably put by *Joſhua* to the Children of *Iſrael*, *Joſh.* 24. 15. *If it ſeem evil unto you to ſerve the Lord, chuſe you this day whom you will ſerve; whether the gods that your fathers ſerved, that were on the other ſide of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whoſe land ye dwell:* And 'tis no

leſs reaſonable in this caſe. Some Religion you muſt be of, or elſe you can have no hope of Salvation; and whatſoever Religion you are of, it muſt needs be your duty to make a publick profeſſion of it; ſo that if you forſake the *Eſtabliſhed Church*, you muſt go to ſome other; Chuſe you then, before you forſake the Religion and Communion that you were brought up in, (chuſe you, I ſay) what Religion you will be of, what Communion you will adhere to.

Will you return back again into *Egypt*; or (in the words of *Joſhua*) *will you ſerve the gods that your fathers ſerved, that were on the other ſide of the floud?* I mean, will you go over to the *Church* of *Rome*? i. e. will you go to a *Church* that has moſt notoriouſly corrupted the Faith of *Chriſt*? To a *Church* that *takes away the key of knowledge* from her people, not ſuffering them to look into the *Holy Scriptures*, which are *the Oracles of God*, and *the words of life*? To a *Church* that has enlarged her *Creed* to double that of the *Apoſtles*; and enjoins as neceſſary to Salvation, the belief not only of the greateſt Falſities, but of the moſt evident Contradictions? To a *Church*, whoſe publick Service is not underſtood by her Members, and which makes her Children ſay, *Amen*, to they know not what? In fine; Will you go to that *Church*, whoſe Worſhip and Service you cannot join in, without being guilty of Idolatry?

What is there in this *Church* that can charm or tempt you to her Communion, unleſs perhaps it be the very eaſy terms on which ſhe promiſes you Salvation?

And this indeed is a reaſonable Inducement to ſuch as would fain go to Heaven, and yet are reſolved not to part with their beloved Sins; But in a matter of ſuch great importance to us, as this is, 'tis good to go upon ſure grounds, and not to try an experiment, that if it fails, will be fatal to us.

Now, that Faith and Obedience will carry us to Heaven, is agreed on all hands; and the Scripture it ſelf plainly aſſures us;

us; but that any thing leſs will do it, we have no good ground to believe. And particularly, That Confeſſion, with the Prieſts Abſolution, will do as well as a Holy Life; That thoſe that want Good Works of their own, may for Money, or by ſome ſlight Penances, purchaſe as much as they want, of thoſe who abound in merit: And that they who take little or no care of themſelves while they live, may have ſufficient care taken of them by their Friends when they are dead; theſe are very comfortable Doctrines indeed, but they are no where taught in Scripture, or grounded upon Reaſon; they are Doctrines, for the truth of which we have only their word, whoſe gain in teaching them is ſo evident, as may juſtly render their Teſtimony ſuſpected.

But without entring upon a particular Examination of them; this one thing alone is a ſufficient prejudice againſt all ſuch eaſy Methods of Salvation, by whomſoever propoſed; That they are clearly contrary to that Account which our *Bleſſed Saviour*, who is *Truth* its ſelf, hath given us of the way to Heaven; and to that advice which he grounds thereupon, in Matth. 7. 13, 14. *Enter ye in at the ſtrait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to deſtruction, and many there be that go in thereat; Becauſe ſtrait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

Well then; If you will not go over to the *Church* of *Rome*; whither is it that you'll go when you leave us? Will you go and join your ſelves to any of the *Separate Aſſemblies* here at home? But if ſo, *To which of them will ye go?* For here is ſuch variety of ways at once offered to you, as is enough perfectly to confound and diſtract you.

I have not time now to tell you how many ſeveral *Sects* there are of Diſſenters from the *Church*, and much leſs to give you a juſt and compleat Character of them, that you may conſider which of them to chuſe; but in general they may be reduced to theſe Four Sorts.

1. Some

1. Some of theſe *Sects* there are, that have either no Creed, or no Sacraments, or no Orders, or no Rule to guide them by, but the Light within them; *Will you go to any of theſe?* But if you do, can you tell what Religion you ſhall be of, or whether you ſhall be of any at all?

2. Others of them there are, that poſitively deny the moſt Fundamental Articles of the *Chriſtian Faith*, as the Doctrine of the Ever Bleſſed *Trinity*, the Incarnation of the *Son* of *God*, the Satisfaction of our *Saviour*, and the like; *Will ye go to them?* But if you do, this is to add hereſy to your Schiſm, and to multiply your Iniquity.

3. Others again there are that teach ſuch Doctrines, as either directly, or in their immediate conſequences, give too great Encouragement to Vice, by rendring a good Life unneceſſary; But I hope I have already mentioned a ſufficient prejudice againſt all ſuch eaſy Religions, ſo that you will not ſo much as once think of going to them.

4. Laſtly, Others there are that profeſs the ſame Faith with the *Church*, and are (as they themſelves ſay) of the ſame Religion that we are of; and differ from us only in ſome External Modes and Rites of Worſhip. Will you go over to theſe?

But why ſhould you make a Schiſm in the *Church* for nothing? Only becauſe her Rites and Ceremonies are not exactly ſuited to your fancy: Why ſhould you break the Unity of that *Church* whereof you are Members, and with which you agree in all the Eſſentials of Doctrine and Worſhip, only for the ſake of two or three harmleſs Ceremonies? which ſhe uſes indeed in her Publick Worſhip for decency and order ſake; but which ſhe enjoins not as any parts of Religion, or as things neceſſary in themſelves, and which being no where forbidden in Scripture, cannot, to be ſure, be unlawful to be uſed; for *where there is no law, there is no tranſgreſſion.*

Rom. 4. 15.

If

If then the *Sect* you deſign to go to, be of the ſame Religion with the *Church* that you leave, why ſhould you leave her, ſeeing by your own confeſſion, ſhe has the *words of eternal life*, as well as they? And if ſhe has, to what purpoſe ſhould you go elſewhere?

Is it (firſt) for better Prayers that you go thither? That can hardly be; However, 'tis what you can't be ſure of, not knowing what their Prayers will be, till you have heard them.

Our Prayers indeed are known what they are; they are free to be read and examined by all: You may (if you will) ſatisfy your ſelves before you join in them, that they are directed to the right Object of our Worſhip; that they are compoſed of ſuch Petitions as are proper to be put up in Publick; and that they are grave and ſerious, and fitted to excite Devotion; whereas, if you go to the Separate Aſſemblies, you know not what God you ſhall worſhip, at leaſt you *know not with what you ſhall ſerve God* till you come thither; you are much like a man that ſubſcribes a Paper or Petition to his Prince without reading it.

Or (ſecondly) is it for better Preaching that you go thither? That's e'ne as it happens, and you may as eaſily be diſappointed in this, as in the other caſe.

And without magnifying our ſelves too much, this I'm ſure I may ſafely ſay, That many that have gone from their own *Church*, to a Separate Aſſembly, to hear a better Sermon, have heard a worſe.

But however that be, ſo long as the Doctrine that is preached in both places, is the ſame, (as you grant it is) there cannot be ſo much difference in the Words and Phraſes wherein it is expreſſed, or in the manner of its delivery, as will ſerve to juſtify a Schiſm.

And beſides, what the *Apoſtle* ſays, is moſt undoubtedly true, *Paul may plant, and Apollo may water, but it is God that giveth the increaſe*: If the Seeds be both of the ſame

ſame Intrinſick Goodneſs (as is now ſuppoſed) one may be more beautiful to the eye than the other, but the only things on which their fruitfulneſs will depend, are the Goodneſs of the Soil they are ſown in, and the Bleſſing of Heaven; And the Grace of *God*, who is the *God of Peace* and Order, may, I'm ſure, be much more reaſonably expected by thoſe that keep the Unity of the *Church*, and are regular and orderly in their Stations, than by ſuch as ſeparate from the *Eſtabliſhed Church*, whereof they are Members, only to gratify their *itching ears*.

In a word; So long as our Prayers are good, although it were ſuppoſed that they are not the beſt; and ſo long as our preaching is ſound and orthodox, although it be not altogether ſo taking as ſome other mens may be; and ſo long as the terms of our Communion are lawful, there can be no reaſon that can juſtify your leaving us. For whither can you go to mend your ſelves? or why ſhould you go away from us at all, ſeeing we have *the words of eternal life?*

I conclude all therefore with thoſe words of the *Apoſtle*, 1 Cor. 1. 10. *Now I beſeech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that ye all ſpeak the ſame thing; and that there be no diviſions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the ſame mind, and in the ſame judgment.*——Which *God* of his great Mercy grant we may all be, for the ſake of our *Lord Jeſus Chriſt*; To whom with the *Father*, and the *Holy Ghoſt*, be all Honour, and Glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

F I N I S.